

TO: City of Fresno
FROM: The Trust for Public Land
DATE: March 9th, 2017
RE: Technical Assistance and Next Steps Recommendation

The Trust for Public Land (“TPL”) is an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization specializing in conservation research, finance, transactions, policy development and implementation. TPL is based in San Francisco with 40 offices nationwide. TPL’s Conservation Finance program helps public agencies and communities create a vision for parks and conservation and raise funds from state and local public sources.

The Trust for Public Land differs from other conservation nonprofits because it works across the full range of landscapes necessary for human health and well-being — from inner city to wilderness. TPL has the expertise and resources to tackle the most complex conservation projects. And TPL is the only national conservation group working to provide close-to-home nature in cities and metropolitan areas, where 85 percent of Americans live.

The Trust for Public Land’s (TPL) National Conservation Finance program helps communities and agencies identify and raise public funds for parks and land conservation from state and local sources. TPL provides professional, technical assistance services to local governments, special districts, and others that need to research and evaluate the feasibility of park and land conservation finance options. Since 1996, TPL has worked on more than 500 successful ballot measures that have created more than \$57 billion in new funding for parks and conservation. Voters have approved 81 percent of the ballot measures supported by TPL.

For more than two decades, The Trust for Public Land has been asked to provide technical advice and assistance to the California State Legislature and dozens of local governmental entities to identify and evaluate viable conservation funding mechanisms.

Given the substantial investment of time and resources required to develop a public funding strategy, early, preliminary research is essential to determine the feasibility of such an effort. TPL has researched and analyzed a range of public finance options that the City of Fresno may consider to fund recreation and parks maintenance, development and improvements throughout the city and in the downtown core. The City of Fresno has now requested a scope of work and direction for further exploration of local financing and management options.

A significant component of TPL’s technical assistance is to understand public opinion surrounding parks and recreation. Feasibility research provides the knowledge base that informs the development of effective public opinion surveys, conducted by a professional pollster, including testing funding mechanisms, levels of funding, purposes and messages.

Then TPL uses the research and 3rd-party polling information to work with the city to design the ballot measure with the very best chance for success. TPL will make specific recommendations

as to the amount and duration of financing, expenditure priorities, election timing, public accountability, and ballot language for a ballot measure.

Feasibility Research and Polling

TPL conducted and delivered a pro-bono feasibility study that examined:

- A general overview of special financing districts such as community facilities districts, assessment districts, and recreation and park districts.
- An overview of financing mechanisms available to cities and special districts in California including descriptions of where and how they have been used by other communities in the state. Mechanisms will include assessments and special taxes such as a parcel tax.
- An evaluation of the most feasible options for creating and financing a district in Fresno (both a downtown district and citywide) including limitations on amounts and uses, revenue generation capacity, and impact to households or tax payers.
- A summary of implementation procedures including timeline and voter thresholds, and next steps.
- A table comparing similar jurisdictions in California.

TPL also funded a public opinion research poll with EMC research to test the feasibility of a tax measure for parks with voters. These results were very promising, showing solid two-thirds support in each council district at this time.

Next Steps

Following up on these initial ballot measure exploration and planning services, the City of Fresno has requested a scope of work for TPL to continue our technical assistance. In order for TPL to continue to support the City, we would require an updated technical assistance request letter given the change in Mayoral Administration. We also recommend planning to bring on a consultant team this fall to inform and support the process.

Suggested timeline of next steps:

- **Spring and Summer 2017**
 - Engage Councilmembers on current feasibility and polling research results and options
 - Finalize needs assessment with parks master-planning process (amount and funding types)
 - Conduct polling to test feasibility of a larger amount and longer duration of funding mechanism as well as special district options, if desired
 - Engage with key stakeholders on needs, direction, and benchmarks for measure
 - Use needs assessment to inform narrowing down funding and management mechanism
 - Council vote on a few funding and management mechanisms to focus on and expenditures of a consultant team

- **Fall 2017**
 - Bring a consultant team on contract to partner with the City on additional polling, drafting ballot language, expenditure planning, stakeholder engagement, media relations, and public education (through Spring 2018)
 - Conduct stakeholder engagement to inform measure planning process (continue through Spring 2018)
 - Conduct public education on current park funding needs and opportunities (Continue through all of 2018)
 - Begin drafting ballot language and expenditure plan
- **Winter 2018**
 - Continue media relations, stakeholder and public engagement
 - Continue refining ballot language and expenditure planning
 - Update on progress to Council
- **Spring 2018**
 - Additional polling (if budget allows) to finalize ballot language and amount/duration
 - City Council votes to put a measure on the ballot

TPL can provide technical assistance on the process outlined above, including making recommendations on consultant services for the functions outlined. TPL's technical assistance on the areas below for the duration of the process (through Spring 2018) will cost around \$50,000-\$70,000, including travel:

- Advice on process and planning for a ballot initiative, including benchmarks and timelines
- Guidance with public opinion polling of the electorate to understand potential voter support for financing options
- Recommendations of most feasible financing and management options and next steps
- Referrals of consultant services for expenditure planning, polling, stakeholder and public engagement
- Strategic advice on expenditure planning and ballot language drafting, including models from other jurisdictions
- Strategic support with the development and implementation of media relations, and a stakeholder and public engagement plan

TPL is interested in supporting Fresno to move forward with or without a fee for service agreement. As a non-profit, helping Fresno increase its park access and equity, and in turn it's health outcomes and climate resiliency, is a priority for us. However, we do not currently have grant funding to cover this work. Our role could also be funded through an outside partner, or, if unfunded it would limit the hours and travel we could dedicate. We recommend an immediate

next step of discussion this timeline and TPL's role, and if it is agreed to execute a fee for service contract we can submit a more detailed proposal with cost breakdowns. At that time we need to execute a new technical assistance request letter as well. We look forward to discussing these next steps, and are excited that the City of Fresno is exploring long-term strategies for a healthy and vibrant park system.

This proposal does not include the actual costs of conducting a public opinion survey or any costs associated with the voter education effort that would be necessary if a measure is referred to the ballot.